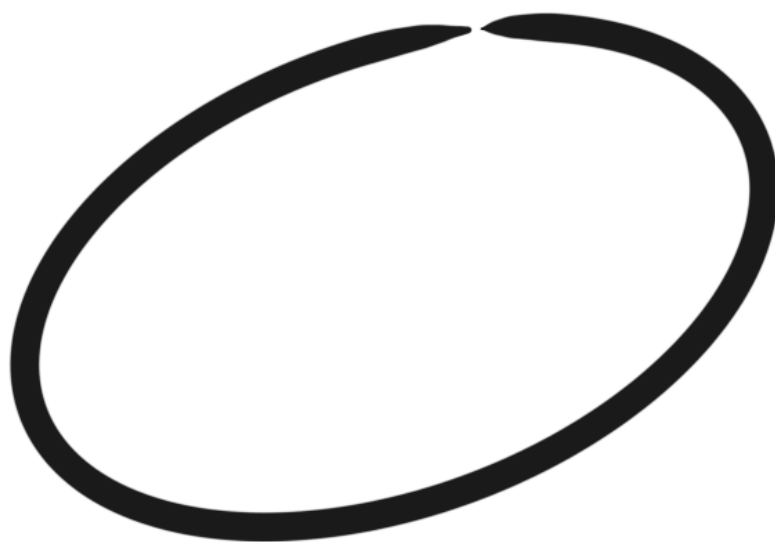
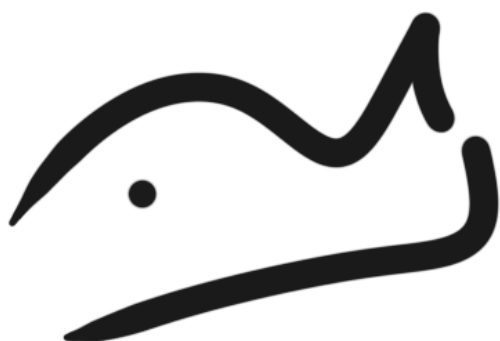


miniMAG

issue08

Love is Love



Petunia

By Ogden Nesmer

Eventually I had to accept that I had been denying the truth. Not even was I in a ‘state of denial—’ some symptomatic reaction to incomprehensible knowledge staring me in the eye — but that my mind was actively forcing me away, driving me into a subconscious corner while it shielded me with its body from the insurmountable yet unacceptable truth:

I missed her.

I missed her body and her soul. I missed the way she moved and looked at me, speaking without words. I missed her soft, pale skin. I missed her company, her spirit, her gaze. Her powerful stare that burned in my memory. She was an angel— my angel. But our love was wrong. The world had condemned us to be apart. This was the truth I was supposed to accept, swallow like a bitter pill. I understood why it was wrong but somewhere, deep inside my mind, too far buried for me to ever admit, I knew it could not be stopped. Our love was powerful, and the world was fleeting.

I would have to see her again.

They had tried to stop us, and for a time they had succeeded. They would try to keep us apart. But I knew, and

she must have known as well. Her love, still burning in private, stoked the coals I had been forced to smother. Nothing and no one would stop us. No distance was too far, and no challenge too great.

I had a new job, and I knew they would never take me back at the aquarium. Glenn was likely still furious. They may have even forced out poor Petunia— the guilt I felt at this. And the anger at the smallness of Glenn.

I tried to be reasonable. I called my old coworkers hoping for some information, just to chat, but they never picked up. Bastards. I folded boxes on an assembly line at my new job, lost in the repetition and stewing on my lost love. Thinking of her. Petunia...

I could no longer be reasonable; I went to the aquarium as a patron, investigating the fish as if I had never seen them before and hadn't spent the past two years monitoring the algae levels of their tanks.

“What are you doing here?”

I stammered. I knew what I wanted to say, but I couldn't bring myself to say it.

“Seriously, Trevor. You need to go.”

“Please,” I smiled nervously and shrugged. “I'm just looking at the fish?”

“You better hope Glenn doesn't catch you...”

He didn't. But I didn't see my precious Petunia, either. Maybe she really was gone, and it was all my fault. She would be the real victim of Glenn's jealous rage, delivered an abrupt transfer to God-knows-where, or simply kept stuck in the back away from the world, and from me...

For two months I folded boxes. Folding boxes and thinking. Dreaming and then bursting my own bubble— she was gone, face it, it's over. But no. Somewhere in my mind: no. It couldn't be. Why? Because it simply couldn't. I could feel it in my chest. It was in the tears I shed each night apart from her. It was in my dreams wherein I did not exist, but there was only her. Her: floating like a radiant cherub come to whisk me off to heaven.

I found myself at the chain-link fence in a black hoodie, waiting for the truck that delivers fish to arrive so I could sneak in the back entrance. Surely that's where she was if she was still here. I was aware how it looked, but I was getting desperate. That damn Glenn was keeping her from me. Hiding her for himself, that low-down, slimy—

“Trevor?”

I was caught, one leg over the fence, I was too impatient to wait.

It was Glenn. He looked less angry than I thought, a little worried even.

I fell to the ground and got on my knees, crying and sniffing back snot as I tried to speak. I begged: please, Glenn. Please. As a man, please understand. I can't control this. I mean you no ill will, but I have to see her. I have to be with her, and you can't keep us apart.

Glenn shook his head and told me he was calling the police. He advised me to get out and not come back. I wept. I couldn't hold it back and I didn't want to anymore. Glenn pulled out his cell phone and started dialing, still shaking his

head, and I stopped holding back. I stopped letting this little man and his corrupt truth stand in the way of what I knew in my gut was real. I tackled him, snatched his phone, and ran in the door locking it snug behind me. I could hear him banging on it from outside, demanding I unlock the door and stop this immediately. He told me it was wrong.

I dropped his phone in the nearest saltwater tank and tore off down the hall.

I couldn't find her. Where was she?

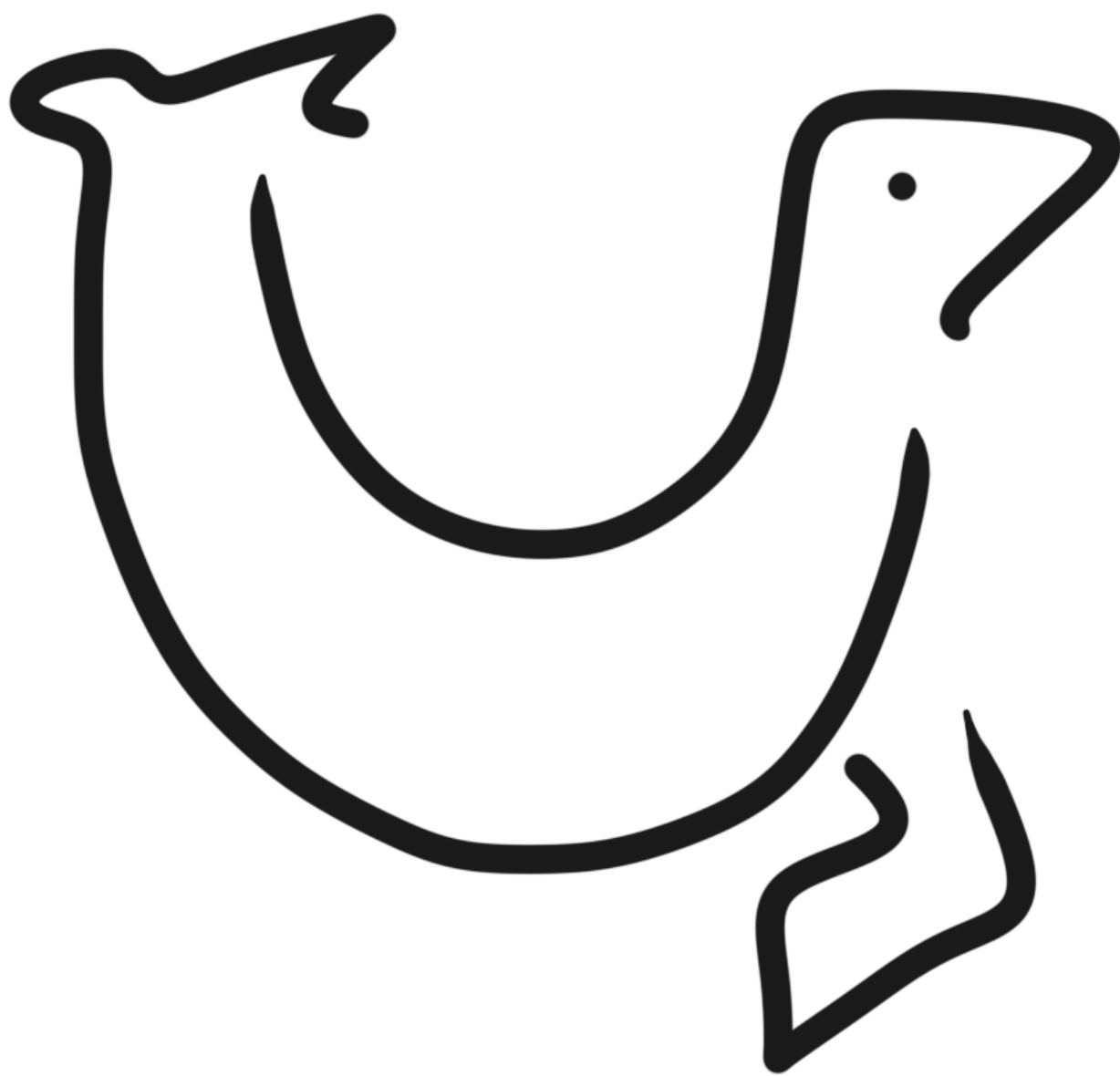
All the other employees had gone home. I scoured all the storage rooms and the back office. I checked the showroom, free from guests and lit dimly. The looped recording of whale facts and schedules for the seal shows played in the distance, and the tiny eyes of a thousand fish watched me suffer, unsympathetic.

Was she gone? Was I too late?

But then I realized, smacking myself on the forehead. There was only one place left to check.

I grabbed the keys from Glenn's desk and made my way to the freshwater lockup. I undid the padlock and swung open the heavy metal door where everything inside was lit aquamarine. Glowing, humming, bubbling, and there she was. Floating to me like in the dreams. Hovering in silence, conveyed by a soft jet of water that made her whiskers dance and her blubber ripple. Her dark eyes looked out blank, but I could feel them taking me in. She was speaking to me. I undressed and got in the water, opening my eyes and putting my fingers out to touch her, her heavy flesh and flippers were

light as air under the water. She felt soft, like I remembered, and beautiful. With my face against her body I could hear the soft murmurs one couldn't from behind a wall of glass. Words saved just for me. I curled up and I let her take me, like a heavenly messenger, off to the other world of my salvation.



Performance Piece

And I tell you I love you for the 50th time tonight
as you stare back at me
and we kiss to our friends' applause.

Another peck before bed,
sommambulating over each other
arms flailing blindly,
kicks unintentional.
Rolling over onto you
where you push me off again,
then I snore as you light a cigarette.

The next night
across a bar
making sure everyone can see:
How much we love each other,
and just how much
we repeat.

Back to bed
where I wake up, arms around you
serpentine, trying to crush you.
And you have one hand on my neck
gently, wishing to choke me.

And in the morning light
following our sleeping melee
we say together:
“I love you, darling.
Goodmorning.”

Lady Mary

By Sam Lee

Let the façade of coldness stay on
a little while longer

Alas, that was the only way you
know how to buffer

Disappointments and disasters
befalling by lot

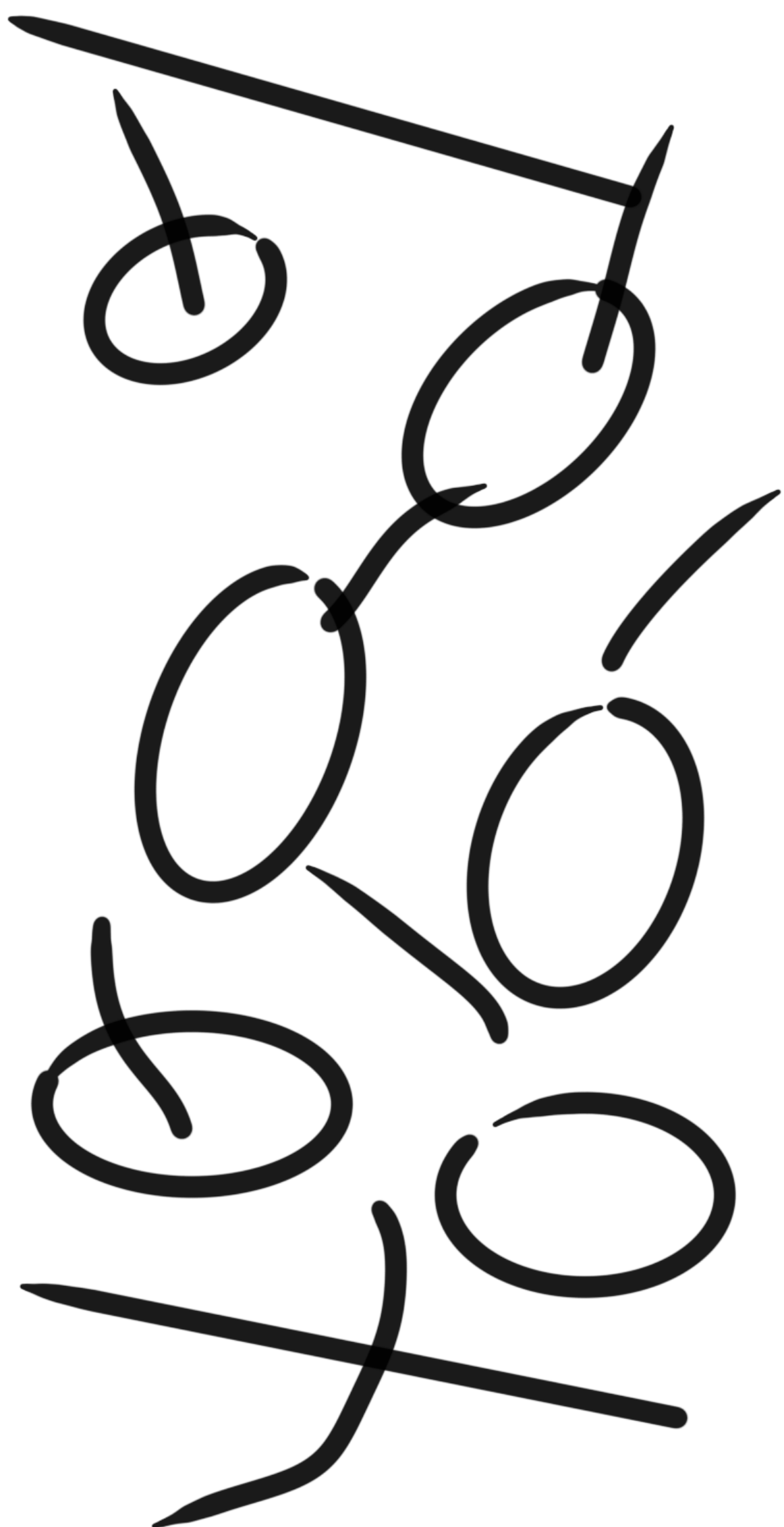
Yesterday he was still there, now
he's not

“Matthew, Mattew ” — you still relish
the softness he found in you

Awakened by his tender kiss, his shirt
smelt of morning dew

Revisiting his blue eyes is the only
futile journey you take

You embrace the limitations of being
human as you embrace the ache



爱着所有

By 又嵐

曾站在爱情的天平上
不平衡看出我的卑微与恨
如今，想把它所有的
都含糊地爱了

23

I still don't know how Kia found me. At first, she was a DM and a follow. Why not meet her for coffee? I was in that part of the city anyways. I was between things, or something like that. I had posted a few game reviews that had gone around a bit, but nothing was really popping off. I spent my days hoping that the same efforts would give me better results. She came screaming out of some digital void, and the next thing I knew we were at dinner together. She was engaged. Today was her birthday. Why was I at her birthday the second time we met? Why wasn't anyone else?

Well, her fiancée was far away, apparently. So far away that she made me promise that we wouldn't speak of him. He was pretty much all we spoke of. She would complain, then once every six months fly off to see him, then come back and complain again. I had caught her during one of those complaining phases. She said a lot of things that rang the warning bells of alcoholism in my mind, but I didn't hesitate to drink with her. She paid for everything, she was older and less, I believe I said "between things" earlier? She was less "between things".

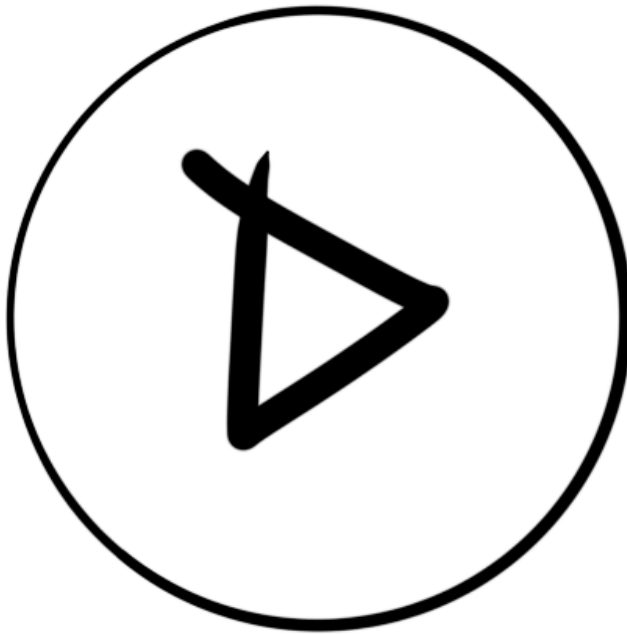
I loved her immediately. I was always in love back

then. It was the easiest way to care. So, I sat and fell in love with her, drink by drink. I told her what she wanted to hear. She smiled and agreed and drank and sized me up approvingly from across the table.

He didn't appreciate her enough, he was much too old for her, he should have pushed harder to be with her, I already mentioned she was younger than him, he had pushed the wedding back the umpteenth time and she was starting to agree with it, and I will mention again that he was much older. And I was younger than her. What she found most exciting: I wanted her; she still had *it*. Even after a bottle or two of wine a day, she still had *it*. She said she would end the engagement; I didn't care whether or not that was true. We shared a cab, swung by my neighborhood first, visited my apartment on a flimsy excuse, kissed in the elevator.

She sat on top of me, partially clothed and laughing, and asked if I had anything to drink. I had a four-year-old bottle of 151. She loved it. Took two shots to my one. She left some pink socks at my place. I dazed off, weighed down by high-proof rum and guilt. Waking up transformed after a dozen nights like this.

That's who I was at 23.



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“Petunia” by Ogden Nesmer
New book *I Pray to the Hungry God* coming in September 2022

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